

Part III: Immigration in the Twenty-First Century

Since the turn of the century, the United States has continued to attract immigrants for a variety of reasons. By 2065, researchers predict that the United States will have an immigrant population—including legal permanent residents, refugees, asylees, and undocumented immigrants—of 78 million people, compared to 45 million in 2015. These immigrants will come from many places and represent a variety of races, ethnicities, and religions.

Trends in immigration in the twenty-first century have been, in many ways, similar to the patterns from previous eras. Immigration has remained open to people with a diverse range of nationalities. Policies have prioritized reuniting families and attracting highly skilled immigrants. At the same time, due to changing international and domestic concerns, recent debates about immigration have differed somewhat from earlier conversations. For one, concerns about national security—which have always influenced U.S. responses to immigration—have become even more central. In addition, responding to undocumented immigration has become increasingly important to many. The government and the public continue to debate how to approach increasing immigration and how to best deal with immigrants already living in the United States. Before you consider the future of U.S. immigration policy, you will explore major issues of the debate as it has taken shape in the twenty-first century.

The Global War on Terror

At 8:46 a.m. on September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 slammed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Within minutes, two other planes filled with passengers crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and a Pennsylvania field. Nearly three thousand people died. These events prompted changes in U.S. policies and attitudes on many issues. Internationally, the United States soon entered into wars in Af-

Part III Definitions

Deportation—The removal of an immigrant from the United States. Usually, deportation takes place against the immigrant's will. An immigration judge orders deportation. Sometimes people also choose self-deportation to avoid further immigration penalties. People who came to the country as undocumented immigrants, as well as people who entered the country legally but later violated the terms of his or her entry, can be deported.

Globalization—The economic, political, cultural, and social transformations occurring throughout the world. It reflects the increased interdependence of various countries and people today. The migration of large numbers of people and the growth of the internet have helped spread ideas and establish connections among cultures that did not exist before.

Islamophobia—The unsubstantiated hatred, fear, and discrimination directed at Muslims or at people perceived to be Muslim.

Social Services and Welfare—Government programs or benefits that assist children, the elderly, impoverished adults, and the disabled.

ghanistan and Iraq. Domestically, the country took other measures—many closely tied to immigration. September 11 and its aftermath greatly shaped debates about immigration, bringing issues of security and Islamophobia to the forefront of such conversations.

How did the events of September 11 influence U.S. debates about immigration?

In the United States, the government enacted laws that it argued protected security following the attacks. But critics claimed that they violated the Constitution. For example, in October 2001, the U.S. government passed



Jim Watson, Public Domain, U.S. Navy Photo.

A member of the Fire Department of New York observes what is left of the south tower after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

sweeping legislation known as the Patriot Act. It allowed the government to conduct secret searches of people's property without a warrant and to more easily tap people's phones.

Muslims and Muslim-Americans soon faced extra scrutiny and suspicion. These actions reminded some of ideas and practices from other time periods. For example,

as had been the case during World War II for Japanese-Americans, many Muslim-Americans faced skepticism, isolation, and interrogation simply because they "resembled the enemy."

"They said that this is a free country, right? But for two months I was locked up, I suffered there and my wife had to leave the Army, and for something I didn't do. I really don't understand it, and no one will explain it to me.... I just want to get my life back. I just hope people will trust me now."

—Ali al-Maqtari, a Yemeni immigrant detained by the U.S. government and later released,
November 25, 2001

For many, security—rather than privacy, freedom, and acceptance—shaped opinions about immigration. The nineteen perpetrators of the attacks were Muslim extremists from the Middle East. Sixteen had entered the country on student visas.

The other three used fraudulent passports and visas to enter the country. Many thought the hijackers' ease of entry revealed vulnerabilities in U.S. border control. This resulted in proposals for restricting immigration and increasing border security.

Later in 2001, the United States refused to admit refugees for two months. Although the United States had planned to admit seventy

thousand refugees that year, the government admitted only twenty-seven thousand. This left thousands of refugees previously approved for admission to the United States stuck in refugee camps (mainly in Africa) with harsh conditions. In 2003, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was formed and assumed control of protecting U.S. borders by coordinating and managing the work of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Border Patrol, and other agencies.

“[N]ational security demands that we know who is living within our borders, especially since 9/11.”

—Senator John Cornyn, May 16, 2006

In addition to shaping government immigration policies, September 11 also informed public views on immigration. As has been the case throughout history, unfounded fears about people from different backgrounds took hold. In particular, Islamophobic arguments about restricting immigration gained momentum in the years following the attacks—arguments that continue into the present-day.

Islamophobia manifested itself in policies and in everyday practices. Some U.S. citizens committed hate crimes against Muslim-Americans—or those perceived to be Muslim—while others damaged mosques and Muslim community centers. For example, on September 15, 2001, a gunman shot the owner of an Arizona gas station to death. The victim, Balbir Singh Sodhi, was a Sikh. Sikhs in the United States are often mistaken for Muslims. Sodhi was also a husband and the father of two daughters. His family and many others believed that his death was a hate crime. Throughout the country, many other acts of hatred and violence also took place. At the same time, others condemned Islamophobic practices.

“The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don’t represent peace, they represent evil and war. When

we think of Islam, we think of a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world. Billions of people find comfort and solace and peace. And that’s made brothers and sisters out of every race—out of every race.”

—President George W. Bush,
September 17, 2001

Despite the violence and hatred that Muslims in the United States often faced, countless Muslim-Americans and Muslim immigrants spoke out against the terrorist attacks of September 11 and rallied together to support all those affected.

“These attacks are against both divine and human laws and we condemn them in the strongest terms. The Muslim Americans join the nation in calling for swift apprehension and stiff punishment of the perpetrators, and offer our sympathies to the victims and their families.”

—Dr. Agha Saeed, national chair of the
American Muslim Alliance,
September 2001

The effects of September 11 on immigration policy were many. In the years that followed, increasingly intense screening lengthened the process of entering the country. Concerns about security dominated the immigration debate and would continue to hold power in the future. In addition, the events of September 11—and other terrorist actions that followed—would provide fodder for years to come for anti-immigration activists to espouse beliefs about Islam that were false and that increased Islamophobia.

The Economy and Immigration

Although the effects of September 11 linger on into the present, as the country began to recover from the immediate devastation of the terrorist attacks, those discussing immigration once more began to focus on economic issues in addition to security. Concerns about undoc-

umented immigration, globalization, U.S. jobs, and other factors continued to play an important role in shaping immigration debates.

How has globalization affected the U.S. economy?

For many in the United States, the globalization of the twenty-first century has created economic uncertainty that affects immigration debates. Some people fear that immigrants take away scarce jobs or drive down wages because they are willing to work for less money.

Economic globalization has had mixed and unequal effects. Economists note that the United States has been more successful than much of the world in adjusting to the demands of globalization. The United States is one of the world's leading exporters. In addition, it maintains a lead in many promising industries—including biotechnology, energy technology, and computer software. U.S. corporations have sought a competitive edge by taking advantage of inexpensive labor in Latin America and Asia.

At the same time, globalization has swept away the employment security of the past for U.S. workers. Hundreds of thousands have lost manufacturing jobs as corporations move manufacturing operations overseas. Businesses large and small must compete on a global scale or be left by the wayside. In addition, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown since the 1980s in the United States. The Congressional Budget Office reports that in 1979, the 1 percent of the population with the highest income in the United States received about the same share of income after taxes as the bottom 20 percent of the population combined. By 2007, the top 1 percent earned more in total than the entire bottom 40 percent.

What types of immigration increased during the twenty-first century?

Continuing the trend that had begun in the decade prior to the September 11 attacks, immigration—both legal and undocumented—soared in the early 2000s. The composition of the immigrant population remained similar.

The majority—55 percent—of all immigrants who came to the United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century came from the Americas. Asians made up about 29 percent of all immigrants who arrived at this time, followed by Europeans (12 percent) and Africans (4 percent).

One type of immigration in particular—undocumented immigration—increased rapidly in the early-to-mid 2000s. The population of undocumented people in the United States peaked in 2007 with 12.2 million undocumented immigrants living in the country—accounting for 4 percent of the total U.S. population. Although undocumented immigration grew in the first decade of the 2000s, since then, the number of undocumented people coming to and living in the United States has stabilized. Since 2008, the number of undocumented immigrants has actually decreased every year. As of 2016, the undocumented population was 10.9 million—the lowest since 2003.

“The facts...tell a different story than what you might hear on the campaign trail or in the halls of Congress, where many send a message that we’re being overrun by undocumented immigrants.... The facts and the data show that’s just not true. Hopefully, political discourse will be more fact-based going forward.”

—Kevin Appleby, director of International Migration Policy at the Center for Migration Studies, January 2016

Like earlier populations of undocumented people, from 2009 to 2013, the majority—an estimated 7.8 million undocumented immigrants—in the United States were born in Mexico or Central America. Many undocumented people came from other regions as well. The second largest population of undocumented immigrants came from Asia (about 1.5 million people)—followed by 690,000 from South America, 423,000 from Europe, Canada or Oceania, 342,000 from Africa, and 260,000 from the Caribbean.

Concerns about undocumented and legal immigration continued to play a major role in dictating U.S. responses to immigration throughout the 2000s.

How did the U.S. government respond to the increase in undocumented immigration?

Various groups involved in the U.S. immigration debate responded to the increase in undocumented immigration. Fueled by economic and security concerns as well as anti-Mexican sentiments, the U.S. government began to devote even more resources to securing its borders. For more than half its nearly two thousand miles, the Rio Grande River marks the U.S.-Mexico border. Many immigrants waded through it, risking their lives to gain entry to the southwestern United States.

“My mother crossed first. I was supposed to follow but at the last minute we pulled out. I was left with an unknown family for two weeks before I would be crossed. I didn’t know if I’d ever see my family again.... All of us are lucky to be here. Some of us could have died at the border, many have.”

—Brian Flores, an undocumented immigrant

In 2006, the U.S. government began construction of a seven hundred mile fence on the U.S.-Mexico border to prevent undocumented border crossings. Increased enforcement around urban areas on the border forced many to cross in more remote, hazardous areas. The increased use of military technology also helped the United States apprehend

and detain more undocumented immigrants. Many of these undocumented immigrants are unaccompanied children. Once in custody, undocumented immigrants are held in detention centers where they await deportation. Detention centers are often overcrowded and the conditions are poor. While detention centers have been part of the story of U.S. immigration for many years, detentions have increased in recent years and many continue to provide evidence of inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrants in these facilities.

“In the interviews that we conduct, the minors are usually overcome by fits of tears, because they are facing a painful process. They have crossed through all of Mexico and have lived through the collection of payments, extortion, and violence.... They arrive here frustrated, anxious,



A Border Patrol agent pats down a young undocumented immigrant at an immigrant detention facility. The number of undocumented youth—most from countries facing violence or political and economic instability in Central America—seeking to enter the United States has increased greatly due to a number of factors. Between 2013 and 2014 alone the number of undocumented, unaccompanied youth crossing the U.S.-Mexico border grew by 90 percent.

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U.S. Air Force Photo by Senior Airman Trisha Harris (CC BY 2.0).

Members of the Michigan National Guard participating in a training in Arizona to learn U.S. Customs and Border Patrol procedures and to look for undocumented activity on the Arizona-Mexico border.

stressed and depressed.”

—Fernando Loera, director of Mexico, Mi Hogar Shelter’s Program for Attention to Migrant Minors, reflecting on his experiences

To the north, the United States shares a border with Canada—over twice as long as the U.S.-Mexico border. But much of it is less clearly marked. In addition to thousands of miles of coastline, there are also over 350 official international points of entry (such as ports and airports) into the United States. Many worry that its vast borders and numerous points of entry make the United States vulnerable to undocumented immigration and efforts by terrorists to sneak into the country.

In addition to securing the borders, some in the United States continued to push for stricter immigration laws. For example, a proposed 2005 law that did not pass would have made it a felony for undocumented people to reside in the country and for people to assist

undocumented immigrants entering or living in the United States.

How did economic concerns affect U.S. immigration leading up to the global economic downturn?

As concerns about undocumented immigration continued to occupy the minds of many, in 2007, an international economic downturn unsettled the lives of millions of U.S. citizens and other people around the world. Economic concerns—especially those about jobs and wages—amplified pre-existing worries about immigration and the economy. The economic recession led to even greater scrutiny of immigrants, their use of social services, and their role in the workforce. Although the economic recession officially lasted only from 2007 to 2009, many people in the United States struggled to regain jobs they had lost and recover a sense of economic security long after. Concerns about the relationship be-

tween immigration and the economy continue into the present.

How did activists respond to the issues facing undocumented immigrants amid economic concerns?

In addition to government policy responses, a number of groups—both those opposed to and those in favor of undocumented immigration—played important roles in shaping U.S. immigration debates at this time.

Many groups involved in anti-immigration efforts continued to protest undocumented immigration. Some cited economic concerns. Others espoused racist ideas about undocumented immigrants.

“Liberals, self-serving politicians and cheap labor advocates have made a mockery of these laws. They have not only allowed MILLIONS of ILLEGAL ALIENS to jeopardize our very way

of life, but defend their ‘right’ to do so! Statistics repeatedly prove that ILLEGAL ALIENS, first committing a criminal act by violating our borders and then bringing their values and culture to our midst, are major contributors to our mounting financial burdens as well as moral and social decay.”

—Barbara Coe, anti-immigration activist and founder and leader of the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, in an undated statement on the group’s website

At the same time, those who supported the undocumented also spoke out. While many major movements and activist efforts took place at this time, 2006 represented a particularly significant time for undocumented activism. Following the proposition of legislation that would negatively affect undocumented people, and amid a climate that many believed was hostile for immigrants in



Supporters of immigrant rights march in San Jose, California in May 2006.

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Todd Dwyer (CC BY-SA 2.0).

DREAM Act activists gather together to protest in Austin, Texas during President Obama's visit to the city in May 2011.

general, a series of protests took place. These nonviolent protests involved between 3.7 million and five million undocumented and legal immigrants, their families, and other allies. They took place in more than 160 cities. The protests began in February and March of 2006 and soon spread to cities across the country. The largest protest took place in Los Angeles in May 2006 where more than six hundred thousand people demonstrated their opposition to the proposed laws. Protests also took place in cities where immigration activism had not historically played a major role in shaping policy, bringing even more voices into the conversation. The proposed law that sparked these protests failed to pass, largely due to these activist efforts. Since then, activists have continued to fight for undocumented peoples' rights.

"I accept who I am. We shouldn't hide. It's not going to lead us anywhere. If we want change but can't vote, we

must unite. Nobody will do anything for me. I will do something. We are all human and deserve to be treated that way. Si se puede."

—Claudia Ramirez, an undocumented immigrant and activist, reflecting on her experiences

How did U.S. policy on undocumented immigration change under President Obama?

When President Obama took office in 2008, many expected swift immigration reform. As the country began a slow economic recovery, activists and legislators hoped to see new immigration laws to address undocumented immigration and immigrant rights.

At the federal level, the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act) was proposed. It was first introduced to Congress in 2001—though it failed repeatedly to gain approval. The act proposed providing a pathway to citizenship for a select group of undocumented youth who either



Protesters at an immigration reform demonstration in Washington, D.C., October 2013. Activism related to undocumented immigration and immigration reform continues to play a major role in shaping national and local conversations about the rights of undocumented people and the responsibility of the United States.

earned a college degree or served in the U.S. armed forces. In 2010, the bill passed in the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate. Although it did not pass, it repeatedly attracted attention at the national and state level.

Some states have also introduced or passed state-level DREAM Acts. These acts provide funding for education and assistance for undocumented, in-state college attendees.

Opponents of the act at both the state and federal levels argued that it could encourage undocumented immigration by those seeking social benefits and would burden citizens and the U.S. economy.

“This bill is a law that at its fundamental core is a reward for illegal activity.”

—Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama,
December 18, 2010

Supporters of the bill, including student activists, argued that the children of undocumented immigrants did not have a say in where they grew up and should still have access to education and opportunities. Many argued that undocumented immigrants who grew up in the United States often consider themselves Americans.

“We tend to hide ourselves because we know that we do not belong in this country, but what if this is the only country you’ve ever known? What if you’ve never been outside these borders?”

—Carmen Lima, undocumented high school student and activist,
in a 2014 interview

In response to the failure of the DREAM Act, immigration activists pushed for a new act—DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Process). In 2012, Obama issued an executive order implementing DACA. The president's executive action provides a two year residence and work period for undocumented people who meet certain criteria—including criteria regarding age, a clean criminal record, years of residence in the United States, age at arrival in the country, and enrollment in or graduation from high school.

Many people qualify for this program, but a number of barriers—including the cost of the application, difficulties proving that one met the eligibility criteria, and concern about what would happen to the program after Obama's presidency—has left many unable or unwilling to apply. Some people estimate that nearly half of all undocumented people in the United States could achieve protected status under DACA and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parental Accountability), yet far fewer have actually applied.

“Our immigration policies should reflect our values and emphasize inclusion, integration, and assimilation—not exclusion and deportation.”

—Representative Luis Gutierrez,
at a June 2016 press conference

While some people have praised the efforts of the U.S. government to assist the undocumented, many activists and other groups voice their disapproval of Obama's approach to undocumented immigration. For example, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus criticized Obama for not doing enough to make a lasting impact. Others called Obama the “deporter in chief.” These critics refer to the fact that deportations reached a record high under Obama in 2013 with 438,421 U.S. deportations.

Although the recession had ended and the U.S. economy had become more stable, the economic consequences of immigration—and especially undocumented immigration—has remained at the center of the immigration debate. Other issues—such as national security



Protesters at an event in Washington, D.C., in April 2016. Like DACA, the Deferred Action for Parental Accountability program (DAPA)—announced by President Obama in 2014—is a deferred action program. Programs such as these grant undocumented people a period of residency and the ability to work in the United States. In other words, the program grants families relief from the immediate threat of deportation. Some states, such as Texas, have argued that DAPA violates states' rights.



Public Domain. Josh Ives.

Internally displaced children living in a camp in Afghanistan, February 2013. For years, many have had to flee their homes in Afghanistan, either moving elsewhere within the country or leaving the country.

and cultural assimilation—have once more become important factors in the immigration debate.

Immigration and the Global Refugee Crisis

In addition to economic concerns and undocumented immigration, debates about immigration today have also become focused on another important issue—protecting the United States while also addressing the global refugee crisis.

In September 2015, a smuggler promised Syrian refugee Abdullah Kurdi a safe voyage on a boat from Turkey to Greece. Instead, Kurdi lost his wife and two young sons when the smugglers took the family on a rubber raft that flipped at sea. An image of Kurdi's three-year-old son, Aylan, created an international outcry—his body had washed up on a Turkish beach.

This photo, and other images and stories of refugees making dangerous journeys, drew international attention. Many countries—

including the United States—struggled to respond to the crisis, juggling humanitarian concerns with concerns about their economy, security, and culture. While people in the United States have always discussed the role that the United States should play in accepting and resettling refugees, these conversations increased in response to the global refugee crisis.

What is the scope of the global refugee crisis?

In recent years, the global refugee crisis has worsened dramatically. The crisis has displaced more people than any crisis since World War II. As of 2015, 65.3 million people had been forcibly displaced. This includes refugees (21.3 million), asylum seekers (3.2 million), and people who have been displaced within their home country—or internally displaced people (IDPs)—(40.8 million). In 2015, more than half of all refugees were children, and nearly one hundred thousand of these children were separated from their families.

“It was very bad in South Sudan. We had to run because there was lots of fighting and people were being killed. I was very scared. Here is a lot better. There is no fighting here.”

—Joseph, a seven-year-old South Sudanese refugee, reflecting on his experiences

Where are most refugees from, and why do they leave their homes?

Worldwide, the top countries of origin for refugees are Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. Refugees leave their home country to escape conflict and persecution. For example, the violence of the Syrian Civil War has prompted about half of the country's population of twenty-two million to flee from their homes since 2011. The war has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians and injured more than a million. While many Syrians seeking to escape this violence are internally displaced, nearly five million Syrians have become refugees in other countries.

“I had to leave the home that I'd spent thirty years building. One day I just had to close the doors, turn the key, and leave everything behind. I'm seventy-two. No one wants to leave home at my age. But I left because I have six sons, and I knew one day the soldiers would come for them.... I watched soldiers take away the neighbors' boys with my own eyes. They were good boys. I'd known them their whole lives. But they were led away like sheep. They didn't even speak up because if they opened their mouths, they'd be shot. I knew it was only a matter of time before they came to our house. We left everything behind, but now my family is safe. So I am happy.”

—Syrian refugee living in Amman, Jordan, in a *Humans of New York* interview, December 4, 2015

Syrians make up a quarter of all refugees worldwide. The international community,

including the United States, has struggled to respond to the Syrian Civil War.

“I can't describe what I felt. No one can.... We are people, not numbers. These 5,000 people waiting at the border wanting to cross, they didn't come of their own free will. No one chooses to leave their home. Everyone has a reason.”

—Haifa, Syrian refugee living in Lebanon, reflecting on her experiences

How has the international community responded to the refugee crisis?

While refugees live throughout the world, the majority go to neighboring countries. Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran, and Ethiopia host the most refugees. One out of four people in Lebanon—a small country that borders Syria—is a refugee.

A wide range of organizations are involved in addressing the global refugee crisis. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)—an international organization established by the UN—is responsible for the protection of refugees. It provides food, water, shelter, education, medical attention, and other services to refugees. But funding shortages significantly affect refugees living in camps. For example, in 2016, the UN provided the twenty-five thousand refugees in Malawi's Dzaleka refugee camp with only half as much food per person as in previous years.

Nongovernmental organizations—such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Rescue Committee—also work to provide essential services to refugees.

In addition, individual governments play a major role by supporting international efforts to assist refugees and by accepting refugees within their borders. Local groups and individuals are also influential in providing assistance—such as financial support, job training, social services, or tutoring—to refugees in their communities.

How has the United States responded to the refugee crisis?

The U.S. response to the refugee crisis has combined its policy of admitting refugees with providing humanitarian aid overseas. Yet many people have criticized the United States for failing to do enough. For example, compared to other wealthy countries—such as Canada and Germany—as of 2016, the United States had admitted a significantly smaller number of Syrian refugees. President Obama raised the overall limit to eighty-five thousand refugees in 2016, intending to admit ten thousand Syrians—a goal reached in August 2016.

In 2015, refugees admitted to the United States came primarily from Myanmar, Iraq, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Bhutan. In 2016, about thirty-four thousand spaces were allotted for refugees from the Middle East and South Asia. Twenty-five thousand spaces were allotted for refugees from Africa, thirteen thousand from East Asia, four thousand from Europe, three thousand from Latin America and the Caribbean, and six thousand more were unallocated.

“We are going to a place called Clearwater, Florida. I don’t know a lot about it. I saw Florida on the television and it looks like it’s close to the sea and has a lot of plants. My dad says the people are friendly and there are a lot of friendly kids there.... I also hope there is a good tree in Florida because I’d like to build a tree house where we can have some adventures.”

—Syrian refugee living in Turkey, in a
Humans of New York interview,
December 5, 2015

In addition to accepting refugees into the country, the United States also seeks to address the global crisis by contributing financial assistance to groups that assist refugees. For example, in 2015, the United States contributed more than \$1.3 billion to the UNHCR.



Georgios Giannopoulos (Ggia) (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Syrian and Iraqi refugees traveling to Greece from Turkey in October 2015. While most refugees remain in the countries neighboring their country of origin, throughout the refugee crisis, more and more refugees have traveled—often in dangerous conditions—to Europe. Many refugees do not survive the journey.

How have concerns about terrorism influenced discussions about refugees in the United States?

Refugee policy is a controversial topic among U.S. government officials and the public. Some people believe that the United States has an obligation to do more to assist refugees. For example, many argue that the United States should accept more refugees. People also argue that once refugees arrive in the United States, the country must provide better social and economic services. They believe that turning away refugees who have fled terrible violence would be a mistake and a betrayal of U.S. values.

“These are victims of the same terror that we’re so horrified by. The impact on people is going to be tragic and the impact on our reputation as a global humanitarian leader is also going to be tragic.”

—Melanie Nezer, vice president of policy and advocacy at Jewish nonprofit refugee service HIAS, 2015

Others disagree. Anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States has grown in reaction to terrorist acts in recent years. These Muslim terrorists claim to act in the name of their religion. As was the case after September 11, this has led some people in the United States to express anti-Muslim viewpoints, engage in racial profiling, commit hate crimes against Muslims, and oppose immigration from Muslim-majority countries. While these are certainly not new practices in the United States, they have intensified as people in the United States have once more grown more concerned about Muslim terrorism. Some favor lowering the number of refugees admitted into the United States. Some propose banning all Muslims.

“Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.”

—Presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, December 7, 2015

In particular, many believe that the United States should not accept Syrian refugees, expressing concerns about security and fears that terrorists posing as Syrian refugees could enter the country. For example, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris, France in November 2015, thirty-one U.S. governors claimed that they would not accept Syrian refugees.

“Texas cannot participate in any program that will result in Syrian refugees—any one of whom could be connected to terrorism—being resettled in Texas.”

—Texas Governor Greg Abbott, in an open letter to President Obama, November 2015

Other government leaders and members of the public have favored welcoming Syrian refugees.

“America was built on the values of acceptance and compassion. And that’s exactly what we should be showing to these poor families who are fleeing unimaginable violence.... When we give in to fear and hatred the terrorists win.”

—Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin, November 2015

“Muslims are human. They are Americans just like everyone else.... There are people in our community who are in the U.S. Army, in U.S. Marines, they are serving as police officers in our community. Stop by our mosque, meet a Muslim, your neighbor, your coworker, and talk to them.”

—Mohammad Sirajuddin, imam in Indiana, reflecting on Islamophobia, November 2015

Additionally, some security experts claim that barring Muslims would make the United States less safe, because it supports terrorists’ message that the United States is at war



John H. Naton. Festival of Faiths. CC BY 2.0

Linda Sarsour, the executive director of the Arab American Association of New York, participating in a discussion on Islamophobia at the Festival of Faiths, an event that explores issues related to faith. Kentucky, May 2016.

with Islam. In addition, many legal experts contend that banning immigrants based on their religion would violate the U.S. Constitution. Advocates of admitting more refugees to the country, especially those from war-torn countries, argue that allowing refugees to find stability in the United States will reduce the threat of terrorism worldwide.

“The fuel for this recruitment process is hatred and bigotry and racism. Anyone who feeds this fire is inadvertently contributing to ISIS’ power.... If you want to kill ISIS, you need to kill the values it represents. Anti-refugee rhetoric makes ISIS more powerful.”

—Majd Alshoufi, Syrian refugee living in Indiana, November 2015

The threat of terrorism in the twenty-first century has raised critical questions about how liberty, tolerance, and security may co-exist.

What is the current status of the debate about immigration?

Immigration remains a central topic in U.S. politics, yet progress on the issue remains uncertain. The debate is so hotly contested in the public and within political parties that Congress has found it difficult to write legislation that has a chance of passing. Although new laws and increased staff have streamlined the immigration process, the system remains slow and overburdened. Questions about security, the economy, assimilation, and diversity all top the list of concerns.